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NATURE AND METHODS OF BRĀHMAṆIC INTERPRETATION

BY

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The Brāhmaṇas, though traditionally regarded as the constituent part of the corpus of the Veda,[1] are really speaking the first commentaries of the *mantra*-portion of the Vedas i. e. Saṁhitās. Even tradition, too, is not ignorant of this fact. References to this effect are found in a very large number. Yāska, refuting one of the arguments of Kautsa, who holds that *mantras* are meaningless,[2] clearly states that Brāhmaṇa is the commentary of the *mantras;* Brāhmaṇa translates what is said in *mantras*.[3] If one goes deep even into the argument of Kautsa one would find that the exponents of the sceptic school, too, regarded Brāhmaṇas as the commentaries of the *mantras*. According to them, the Brāhmaṇas prescribe the employment of the *mantras* in certain sacrifices. If *mantras* had meaning, where was the necessity of injunctions that they should be employed on particular occasions? The meaning of the *mantras* should tell us where they should be used. Since Brāhmaṇas tell us about the use of the *mantras*, it follows that the latter have no meaning.[4] From this argument of Kautsa it is implied that he too regarded the Brāhmaṇas as commentaries of the *mantras*. The objection raised by the opponent, as shown in the *Mīmāṁsā-sūtra* of Jaimini, that the *mantras* have no meaning, and it is Brāhmaṇas which tell their meaning,[5] is nothing but an indirect confession that the Brāhmaṇas are the commentaries of the *mantras*. While refuting the view of the opponents, Jaimini clearly says that *mantras* have their meanings and the Brāhmaṇas bring those meanings to light.[6] The later commentators of the Vedas have not only unanimously recognised the Brāhmaṇas as the commentaries of the *mantras* but have accepted them as authority for the interpretation of the Vedas. They based their commentaries on the Brāhmāṇas and none could challenge their genuineness. They regarded them as an inevitable source for Vedic interpretation. Veṅkaṭamādhava in his *Ṛgarthadīpikā* holds that Brāhmaṇas are more helpful for interpretation of

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1 *mantrabrāhmaṇayor vedanāmadheyam* / (*Āpastambayajña-paribhāṣā*, I. 1. 31)

2 *anarthakā hi mantrāḥ* / (*Nirukta* I. 15).

3 *yatho etat* / *brāhmaṇena rūpasampannāḥ vidhīyante iti* / *uditānuvādaḥ sa bhavati* / (*Nir.* I. 16)

4 *athāpi brāhmaṇena rūpasampannā vidhīyante* / (*Nir.* I. 15).

5 *tad arthaśāstrāt* / (*Mīmāṁsā Sūtra*, I. 2. 31)

6 *guṇārthena punaḥ śrutiḥ* / (*Ibid*, I. 2. 41)

the Vedas than the grammar and *Nirukta*. According to him, the meaning of the *mantras* which is not known otherwise or which is difficult to understand, can be ascertained among the persons who have the knowledge of the Brāhmaṇas. Persons who have laboured upon the study of the *Nirukta* and grammar only, know only one-fourth of the Saṁhitās. But those who have the knowledge of the Brāhmaṇas and have studied them well, they know the mode, style and usage of the word and they are competent enough to explain the entire meaning of the *mantras*.[7]

The word *Brāhmaṇa* is a derivative of *Brahman* ($\sqrt{}$*bṛṁh* ' to elaborate ') which means *mantra*[8] or Veda.[9] They were elaborations or explanations of the *Brahman*, hence the name *Brāhmṇa*.[10] This name is also got on account of their being collections of sayings and discussions of ritualistic and metaphysical topics of the Brāhmaṇas[11] who were versatile in the science of sacrifice. Even if we accept this view we have to accept that the Brāmaṇas are the commentaries of the Vedas, for sayings and discussions which include *upaniṣad, itihāsa, anvākhyāna, purāṇa, svara, saṁskāra, nirukta, anuśāsana, vākovākya, kalpa, gāthā, nārāśaṁsī*,[12] etc. form part of the Brāhmaṇas,[13] not of the *mantra*. They are called *arthavāda*.

The word *pravacana* meaning ' lecture ' has very frequently been used for the Brāhmāṇas.[14] The knowledge of the *mantras* which the seers had

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7 *asmābhis tviha mantrāṇām arthaḥ pratyekam ucyate /*
ye 'jñātā ye ca sandigdhās teṣāṁ vṛddheṣu nirṇayaḥ //
saṁhitāyās turīyāṁśaṁ vijānanty adhunātanāḥ /
niruktavyākaraṇyor āsīd yeṣāṁ pariśramaḥ //
atha ye brāhmaṇārthānāṁ vivektāraḥ kṛtaśramāḥ /
śabdarītiṁ vijānanti te sarvaṁ kathayanty api //
—Veṅkaṭamādhava, Intro. verses, Aṣṭaka 8, Chap. I, verses 8–10

8 *brahma vai mantraḥ* / (*ŚB* VII. 1. 1. 5)

9 *vedo brahma* / (*JUB* IV. 11. 4. 3)

10 *brahmaṇāṁ vedānām imāni vyākhyānāni brāhmaṇāni* / Svami Dayananda, *Anubhramocchedana*, p. 16.

11 Haug, M.: Tr. of the *Aitareya Brāhmaṇa*, Intro. pp. 5. 6, London, Trübner & Co. 1883.

12 *ime sarve vedā nirmitāḥ sakalpāḥ sarahasyāḥ sabrāhmaṇāḥ sopaniṣatkāḥ setihāsāḥ sānvākhyānāḥ sapurāṇāḥ sasvarāḥ sasaṁskārāḥ saniruktāḥ sānuśāsanāḥ sānumārjanāḥ savākovākyāḥ* / (*Gopatha Br.* I. 2. 10)

13 *nanu brahmaprakaraṇe mantrabrāhmaṇavyatiriktā itihāsādayo bhāgā āmnāyante — yad brāhmaṇān itihāsān purāṇāni kalpān gāthā nārāśaṁsīḥ* (*Tai. Ā.* 2. 9. 2.) *iti* / *maivam* / *viprapariv rājakanyāyena brāhmaṇādyavāntarabhedānām eva itihāsādīnāṁ pṛthag abhidhānāt* / Sāyaṇa, *Ṛgvedabhāṣyabhūmikā*, p. 37.

14 *pravacanaśabdena brāhmaṇam ucyate* / *Puṣpasūtra* ed. by Lakṣmaṇa Śāstrī, Chaukhamba Skt. Series, 1923. *agryaḥ sarveṣu vedeṣu* / *MBh* (Poona), Anuśāsana 90. 28.

perceived through their revelation, was proclaimed or imparted through *pravacana* to those who were not endowed with the power of perception through revelations.[15] This, too, shows that the Brāhmaṇas were the commentaries of the Vedas. Moreover, the word *brāhmaṇa* is sometimes used in the sense of 'explanation'. Skandasvāmin uses the term '*vivaraṇa*[16]' for the Brāhmaṇic interpretation. Modern scholars are unanimous in regarding the Brāhmaṇas as interpretations of the Vedas.

Nature of Brāhmaṇic Interpretation :—

The seer-poets who had composed the *mantras*, and their immediate posteriors very well knew the meaning of the *mantras*. But in course of time when the language of the *mantras* became out of use and the people lost the insight of the seers the *mantras* became obscure for the common people. Now there was a risk of their being gradually lost in oblivion due to the ignorance of the meaning, had there no effort been made to preserve them. The problem was how to preserve the *mantras*? Among many other ways the first and perhaps the best way which was invented to this effect was to employ them in the rituals which had grown up to a considerable extent at that time. Originally the seer-poets did not compose the *mantras* for the ritualistic purposes. But as the institution of sacrifice took prominent place *mantras* began to be employed in sacrifices. Moreover, some new *mantras* were also composed, solely keeping the sacrifices in view. This tradition continued to a considerable period and gradually it became an established fact that the threefold *mantras* — *Ṛk*, *Yajus* and *Sāman*— were milked from the fire, wind and the sun respectively with a view to successfully performing the sacrifices.[17] The employment of *mantras* in the sacrifices by the four groups of the officiants (Ṛtvigs) had become so prevalent that Vyāsa had to accept it as the main principle of collection of the four Saṁhitās. The *Vedāṅga Jyotiṣa* clearly mentions that Vedas were meant for the successful performance of the sacrifices.[18] But when once this became established that Vedas were meant for the sacrifices the question arose : how did they serve the sacrifices? This question was not answered in the Saṁhitās, for they were merely collec-

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[15] *sākṣāt kṛtadharmāṇa ṛṣayo babhūvuḥ / te'varebhyo 'sākṣātkṛtadharmabhya upadeśena mantrān samprāduḥ / (Nir. I. 20)*

[16] *Śatapathabrāhmaṇe vivaraṇād vṛṣāyatir aśanārtha iti gamyate* / Skandasvāmin on *ṚV* I. 32. 3.

[17] *agnivāyuravibhyas tu trayaṁ brahma sanātanam /*
dudoha yajñasiddhyartham ṛgyajuḥsāmalakṣaṇam // Manusmṛti I. 23

[18] *vedā hi yajñārtham abhipravṛttāḥ*
kālānupūrvā vihitā ca yajñāḥ /
tasmād idaṁ kālavidhānaśāstraṁ
yo jyotiṣaṁ veda sa veda yajñam // Vedāṅga-Jyotiṣa, verse 3

tions of the *mantras*. The experts were utilizing them in the sacrifices with their own accords. However, a need was felt to compose a sort of literature which could tell the implications of the *mantras* in various rituals with the reasons why a certain *mantra* must be uttered in a particular ritual and also the rules or modes of conducting sacrificial ceremonies with reasons why a certain rite must be performed in a definite way. As a result of this need, two new devices of composition viz. *Vidhi* and *Arthavāda* came into light. While the *Vidhi* was intended to tell the implications of *mantras* in various rituals and also rules of conducting the sacrificial ceremonials, the *Arthavāda* was intended to tell the reasons way a certain *mantra* must be uttered in a particular ritual and also the reasons why a certain rite must be performed in a definite way. These two devices viz *Vidhi* and *Arthavāda* constituting the body of the Brānmaṇas were the initial phase in the evolution of Vedic interpretation. In the sentences containing *Vidhi* and *Arthavāda* the nature and modes of Brāhmaṇic interpretation can be visualized. An unknown ancient authority holds that the *Vidhis* of the Brāhmaṇas comprise ten elements[19] viz., *hetu* (argumentation or reasoning), *nirvacana* (etymology), *nindā* (censure), *praśaṁsā* (recommendation), *saṁśaya* (controversy), *vidhi* (injunction), *parakriyā* (achievements of others), *purākalpa* (performance of sacrificial acts in former times i. e. the numerous mythical stories of primeval events), *vyavadhāraṇa-kalpanā* (reaching a conclusion) and *upamāna* (simile). But, as a matter of fact, most of these elements come under *Arthavāda*, for they are used in the Brāhmaṇas to assist the *Vidhi*. They may be deemed as devices introduced by the Brāhmaṇas to explain the Vedic *mantras*. For clear understanding of the nature and modes of the Brāhmaṇic interpretation, some of its devices are being discussed here in the following pages :

Implication (*viniyoga*) — The sentences which prescribe the liturgical employment of Vedic *mantras* are called *Vidhi* and the process of employing a *mantra* in a particular rite is called *viniyoga*. Śabarasvāmin regards *Vidhi* as a Brāhmaṇic form of Vedic interpretation. He holds that the words of the Brāhmaṇas which contain explanations of the *mantras* are called *Vidhi*.[20] Giving implication of *ṚV*. V. 75. 9 as a final stanza of the morning litany the *Aitareya Brāhmaṇa* says : *abhūd uṣā ruśatpaśur ity uttamayā paridadhāti* (7.8). The Brāhmaṇas are full of such sentences giving implications of the *mantras*. Though this method of interpreting a *mantra* is seen throughout

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19 *hetur nirvacanaṁ nindā praśaṁsā saṁśayo vidhiḥ /*
parakriyā purākalpo vyavadhāraṇakalpanā /
upamānaṁ daśaivaite vidhayo brāhmaṇasya tu //
quoted by Sāyaṇa in *Ṛgvedabhāṣyabhūmikā*

20 *mantravyākhyānarūpo brāhmaṇagataḥ śabdo vidhiśabda ity ucyate /* Śabara *JMS*. I. 2. 53.

the Brāhmaṇas, Veṅkaṭamādhava, however, takes it as the best one for ascertaining the meaning of the *Yajus mantras*. According to him, the meaning of *Yajus mantras* can be ascertained only by the knowledge of the implications of the *mantras*.[21] Since the Brāhmaṇas give the authentic knowledge of the implications of the *mantras* hence it is implied that they should be regarded as the most authentic interpretation of the *mantras*.

Argumentation (*hetu*) — The Brāhmaṇas give reasons as to why a certain *mantra* should be employed in a particular ritual. This device was intended not to interpret the contents of the *mantras* philologically or historically, but to show their adaptability to their ritual use, their symbolical value, the equivalences which might be deduced from them. For example, the *Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa*, giving reasons as to why the sacrificer recites the *mantra* viz., *agne vratapate vratam̐ cariṣyāmi* (*YV.* 1. 5) etc., at the time of taking vow before entering into the performance of the rites, says : *agnir vai devānām̐ vratapatis tasmā evaitat prāha* (*ŚB.* 1. 1. 1. 2); i. e. Agni is the lord of vows of the gods; when the sacrificer recites the said *mantra* he takes the vows before the very Agni and implores him to bring the sacrifice to its successful and fruitful completion. The *Aitareya Brāhmaṇa* giving reasons as to why the Hotā employs the *mantra*, *arūrucad uṣasapṛśnir agriya* (*RV.* IX. 83. 3) etc. in the *Pravargya*, says : *arūrucad uṣasapṛśnir agriya iti rucitavatī rucam evāsmiṁs tad dadhāti* (*AB.* 4. 421), i e. this Ṛk contains the word *ruca* meaning light and by reciting this *rucitavatī Ṛk* he verily enlightens the *Pravargya*. Sometimes the Brāhmaṇas give reasons for employment not of a *mantra* only but of the entire hymn also in a certain ritual. For example, the *Aitareya Brāhmaṇa* giving the reasons as to why *ṚV.* II. 39 (containing eight *mantras*) should be employed in the *Pravargya* says : ' *grāvāṇeva tadidartham̐ jarethe* ' *iti sūktam akṣī iva karṇāv iva nāsevety aṅgasamākhyā 'yam evāsmiṁs tadindriyāṇi dadhāti / tad u traṣṭubham̐ vīryam̐ vai triṣṭub vīryam evāsmiṁs tad dadhāti* / (4. 4) i. e. the Hotā recites the hymn beginning with *grāvāṇeva* etc. (*RV.* II. 39. 1-8) which incorporates the words *akṣi*, *karṇau*, *nāsā* ; and by reciting this very hymn he verily puts these organs intact ; this hymn belongs to Triṣṭubh metre, and since Triṣṭubh is vigour, hence (by reciting this hymn) he puts vigour in the sense-organs. Sometimes the Brāhmaṇas narrate an Ākhyāna to corroborate the implication of the *mantras*. For example the *Aitareya Brāhamaṇa* (7-6) giving reasons as to why the Hotā recites *ṚV.* X. 30. 12 in the morning litany narrates the following Ākhyāna :

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[21] *viniyogaparijñānād yajuṣām arthaniścayaḥ /*
Veṅkaṭamādhava, Introductory vesses, Aṣṭaka 1, Chap. I, 29.

prajāpatau vai svayaṁ hotari prātar anuvākam anuvakṣyati sarvā devatā āśaṁsanta mām abhi pratipatsyati mām abhīti | sa prajāpatir aikṣata yady ekāṁ devatām adiṣṭām abhi pratipatsyāmītarām ekena devatā upāptā bhaviṣyantīti | sa etām ṛcam apaśyad 'āpo revatīr' iti | āpo vai sarvā devatā revatyaḥ sarvā devatāḥ | sa etayarcā prātar anuvākaṁ pratyapadyata | tāḥ sarvā devatāḥ prāmodanta mām abhi pratyapādi mām abhīti |

i. e. " when Prajāpati himself as Hotar was about to recite the morning litany all the deities took the view, ' with me he will begin; With me? ' Prajāpati pondered, ' If I shall begin with one specified deity, then by what means shall I win over the other deities? ' He saw this *Ṛg* verse ' O, waters, sources of wealth ' etc. The waters are all the deities. With the *Ṛg*-verse he began the morning litany. All these deities were delighted, ' with me he has begun, with me " ? Such Ākhyānas are very frequently found throughout the Brāhmaṇas. Veṅkaṭamādhava regards these Ākhyānas of the Brāhmaṇas as most essential for ascertaining the meaning of the Ṛgvedic *mantras*.[22] About this sort of interpretation Prof. J. Gonda observes: ' Those arguments and explanations which several texts belonging to different schools have in common may be regarded as reflecting more or less general opinions, notwithstanding such eventualities as borrowing or independent adoption of the same line of reasoning. In other cases the possibility of explanation *ad hoc* and of the misunderstanding of the ritual acts - of reading more into them than was intended or implied - should by no means be ruled out. In interpreting the sacrificial ceremonies these authors were much inclined to ' elevate ' the ritual practices and to emphasize their importance irrespective of whether they were traditional in the Āryan upper circles or of popular origin. For that purpose they resorted to various devices, establishing esoteric significance, divine connexion or relations with the Soma rites. Their ' symbolic ' or interpretative explanations were no doubt in many cases foreign to the original design or tenor of a story quoted or ritual act discussed. On the other hand, not all Śrauta rituals were a matter of general interest or received a special treatment in all Brāhmaṇas. Lastly, the later Brāhmaṇas are not averse to including other ritual performances, evincing also a tendency to more spiritual interpretations '.[23]

Etymology (*nirvacana*) — Etymology was one of the devices introduced by the Brāhmaṇas to explain certain words occurring in the *mantras* employed in the ritual. Moreover, with the development of the institution

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[22] *itihāsair ṛgarthānāṁ bahubrāhmaṇadarśitaiḥ | Ibid.*

[23] Gonda, J. : *A History of Indian Literature* (Vedic Literature), Vol. I, Part I, Otto Harrassowitz, Wiesbaden, 1975, pp. 370-71.

of sacrifice to a great extent many technical terms whose meanings were not clear to everybody had also begun to be introduced by the practitioners of the ritual. So a need was felt to explain such technical terms, and for this purpose the authors of the Brāhmaṇas evolved this new device, viz., etymology. Thus the Brāhmaṇas give etymologies of both the words occurring in and outside the *mantras*. For example, the *Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa* explaining the *Yajus mantra* viz. *devīr āpo agreguvo agrepuvaḥ* etc. (*YV.* 112) gives the etymologies of the words *agreguvaḥ* and *agrepuvaḥ* in the following way : waters are called *agreguvaḥ* for they go to the ocean first[24] and accordingly the word *agreguvaḥ* is derived from *agra* + *gu or gam* 'to go'. Waters are called *agrepuvaḥ* for they eat of the king Soma first[25] and accordingly the word *agrepuvaḥ* is derived from *agra* + *pū* 'to eat.' In the *Dhātupaṭha* of Pāṇini the root *pū* is not used in the sense of 'eating'. It is used in the sense of 'purifying'. Mahīdhara commenting on this *Yajus mantra* gives both the meanings of *agrepuvaḥ*. The meaning of *agrepuvaḥ* as 'eating' is entirely based on the etymology of the *ŚB*. There is a large number of words whose meanings as given in the Brāhmaṇas in etymologising those words do not adhere to the meanings of the roots as given in the *Dhātupāṭha*. Sometimes the Brāhmaṇas give many etymologies of a word. It happens in two ways : firstly, a Brāhmaṇa gives more than one etymologies of a word, and secondly, a word has been etymologised variously in different Brāhmaṇas. This is because of the fact that things can have more than one aspect and this meant that more than one etymologies could be regarded as simultaneously correct.[26] For example the *ŚB* etymologises the word *śiras* firstly from *śrī* 'to resort' : the head is called *śiras* because breath resorts to it;[27] secondly from *śrī* : the head is called *śiras* because there well-being (*śri*) is concentrated.[28] We find the form and concept of etymologies in a very developed stage in the Brāhmaṇas, and on the basis of the principles of those very etymologies, later on, there developed a systematic branch of the science of etymology. In the time of Yāska it was regarded as one of the most important and infallible method of Vedic interpretation. It was the

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24 *agreguva iti tā* (*āpaḥ*) *yat samudraṁ gacchanti tenāgreguvaḥ* / (*ŚB* 1. 1. 3. 7.)

25 *agrepuva iti tā* (*āpaḥ*) *yat pratyakṣaṁ somasya rājño bhakṣayanti tenāgrepuvaḥ* / *Ibid.*

26 *evam anyeṣām api sattvānāṁ sandehā vidyante* / *tāni cet samānakarmāṇi samānanirvacanāni* / *nānākarmāṇi cen nānānirvacanāni* / *yathārthaṁ nirvaktavyāni* / (*Nirukta* II. 7)

27 *yac chriyaṁ samudauhans tasmāc chiras tasmin etasmin prāṇā aśrayanta tasmād vevaitac chiraḥ* / (*ŚB* 6. 1. 1. 4)

28 *śrīḥ vai śiraḥ* / *śrīr hi vai śiras tasmād yo'rdhasya śreṣṭho bhavaty asāvamuṣyārdhasya śira ity āhuḥ* / (*ŚB* I. 4. 5. 5)

only source of knowing the inherent meaning of the *mantra*.[29] Yāska accepted the etymologies of the Brāhmaṇas and incorporated them in his *Nirukta* with remark *iti vijñāyate*.[30] The later commentators, too, while explaining a certain *mantra* give emphasis on the etymologies of the Brāhmaṇas. About the nature and significance of the etymologies of the Brāhmaṇas Prof. J. Gonda observes : 'Though most of these etymologies are in the light of modern linguistics complete failures, they should not, with previous authors, be described as quibbles or infantile puns. Always engaged in attempts at finding the connexions between the phenomena and to understand the at first sight mysterious bonds between these and the Unseen and much inclined to take words, and especially names, to be instinct with power these authors practised the art of etymology as a means of gaining knowledge of the ideas expressed by words, of penetrating into the hitherto unknown nature of an object or a person, of acquiring control over them. These etymologies reveal to us the authors' view of the above connections; the more frequent ones may be regarded as reflecting more or less fixed convictions'.[31]

Besides the above mentioned three main devices, viz., *viniyoga*, argumentation and etymology, the Brāhmaṇas introduced many other devices also among which mention may be made of *Bandhu* and *Rūpa*. *Bandhu* was a device introduced by the Brāhmaṇas to explain a *mantra* with a conviction that all things and events are connected with one another, resulting into many imaginary liturgic equivalences. For example, the *Aitareya Brāhmaṇa* prescribes reciation of the seventeen *Ṛk mantras* by the Hotar priest at the time of enkindling the fire. Giving *Bandhu* of these *sāmidheni mantras* the *AB* says : 'Prajāpati is seventeen-fold ; the *saṁvatsara* i. e. year consisting of twelve months and five seasons is seventeen-fold, therefore Prajāpati is *Saṁvatsara* ; the *sāmidhenī Ṛks* are seventeen, hence they are the resort of Prajāpati ; and whoever knows this attains the prosperity'.[32] The metres, vigour-sustaining deities by which everything is supported, play a very important part in these *Bandhus*. They are brought into relation, homologised, identified *inter alia* with the three regions of universe, the cardinal points of the compass, the seasons, gods, the divisions of the population, valuable

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29 *athāpīdam antareṇa mantreṣv arthapratyayo na vidyate / artham apratiyato nātyantaṁ svarasaṁskāroddeśaḥ / tad idaṁ vidyāsthānam / vyākaraṇasya kārtsnyaṁ svārthasādhakaṁ ca /* (*Nirukta* I. 15)

30 *yad avṛṇot tad vṛtrasya vṛtratvam iti vijñāyate / yad avartata tad vṛtrasya vṛtratvaṁ iti vijñāyate /* (*Ibid.* II. 17)

31 Gonda : *op. cit.*, p. 377.

32 *saptadaśa sāmidhenīr anubrūyāt / saptadaśo vai prajāpatir dvādaśa māsāḥ pañcartavo hemantaśiśirayoḥ samāneva tāvān saṁvatsaraḥ prajāpatiḥ / prajāpatyā yatanābhir evābhī rādhnoti ya evaṁ veda /* (*AB* 1. 1)

qualities, the vital breaths, the parts of the body and the sacred fire-place.[33] On the strength of these homologizations the sacrificer can, by means of a verse in corresponding metres, realize definite wishes. For example the *AB* (5. 2.) prescribes the stanzas in different metres to be recited by the Hotar priest, at the time of carrying Agni (*Agni-praṇayana*) from the *Āhavanīya kuṇḍa* to the *uttara-vedī*. If the sacrificer is a Brāhamaṇa the Hotā recites the Gāyatrī stanza (*RV.* X. 176. 2) for the Brāhmaṇa is related to the Gāyatrī ; the Gāyatrī is energy and Brāhmaṇic illustrious ; energetic and illustrious does he become who knowing thus uses Gāyatrī stanzas.[34] If the sacrificer is a Rājanya the Hotā recites the Triṣṭubh stanza (*ṚV.* III. 64. 1) for Rājanya is related to the Triṣṭubh ; the Triṣṭubh is vigour and power; vigorous and powerful does he become who knowing thus uses the Triṣṭubh stanzas.[35] If the sacrificer is a Vaiśya the Hotā recites the Jagati stanza (*ṚV.* IV. 7. 1), for vaiśya is related to the Jagati ; animals are also related to the Jagati; rich in animals does he become who knowing thus uses the Jagati stanza.[36] The device of *Bandhu* was also intended to explain equivalences between the sacrifice and the body of the cosmic Puruṣa or between ritual acts and cosmic events. The germs of later philosophical and symbolical interpretations may be seen in the *Bandhus* of the Brāhmaṇas.

Rūpa was another device very frequently used by the Brāhmaṇas to explain Vedic *mantras*. It was a kind of identification or equivalence. A thing is said to be a form or representative of another. For example the *Aitareya Brāhmaṇa* says : 'Gāyatrī is the form of illustriousness' ; 'Uṣṇik is *Āyu*' ; 'Bṛhatī is *śrī* and *yaśaḥ* ; Virāṭ is *anna*'[37]. In this type of interpretation the Brāhmaṇas use a type of syllogism. For example, pointing out the significance of the Āprī hymns the *Aitareya Brāhmaṇa* (6. 4) puts the following syllogism : 'With the Āprī stanzas he delights ; the Āprī stanzas are brilliance and Brāhmaṇical illustriousness ; verily thus with brilliance and Brāhmaṇical illustriousness he causes him to prosper '.[38] Giving

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[33] Vide Gonda, *op. cit.*, p. 371

[34] *pra devaṁ devyā dhiyā bharatā jātavedasam / havyā no ṣakṣad ānuṣag iti gāyatrīṁ brāhmaṇasyānubrūyāt / gāyatro vai brāhmaṇas tejo vai brahmavarcasaṁ gāyatrī tejasaivainaṁ tad brahmavarcasena samardhayati /* (*AB.* 5. 2)

[35] *imaṁ mahe vidadhyāya śūṣam iti triṣṭubhaṁ rājanyasyānubrūyāt / traiṣṭubho vai rājanyo ojo vā indriyaṁ vīryaṁ triṣṭub vjasaivainaṁ tad indriyeṇa vīryeṇa samardhayati /* (*AB* 5. 2)

[36] *ayam iha prathamo dhāyi dhātṛbhir iti jagatīṁ vaiśyasyānubrūyāt / jāgato vai vaiśyo jāgatāḥ paśavaḥ paśubhir evainaṁ tat samardhayati /*

[37] *tejo vai brahmavarcasaṁ gāyatrī ... ... āyur vā uṣṇik ... ... śrīr vai yaśaś chandasāṁ bṛhatī /* (*AB* 1. 5)

[38] *āprībhir āprīṇāti / tejo vai brahmavarcasam āpriyas tejasaivainaṁ tad brahmavarcasena samardhayati /* (*AB* 6. 4)

Rūpa-type interpretation of *ṚV.* X. 131 the *Aitareya Brāhmaṇa* (30. 3) puts the following syllogism : ' He recites the sukīrti hymn; the sukīrti is a birth place of gods ; thus he produces the sacrificer from the sacrifice as a birth place of gods '.[39]

Rūpasamṛddhi was also a type of interpretation which the Brāhmaṇas used very frequently. When a *Ṛk* or *Yujus mantra* speaks of the act which is being performed with the recitation of that very *mantra*, it is called *Rūpa-samṛddhi.*[40] For example the *Aitareya Brāhmaṇa* (3. 5, b) explaining the *ṚV* VI. 16. 13-15 says : ' He recites three Gāyatrī Ṛks belonging to Agni viz. *tvām agne puṣkarād adhi* etc. at the time of churning of fire (from two fire sticks) ; by this he causes the sacrifice(r) prosper with deity and metre of their own. When he says *atharvā niramanthata* etc., it is in accordance with the act of *Agnimanthana* ; it is the accomplishment of sacrifice when the *Ṛk* speaks the same act which is being performed.[41]

To name a *mantra* or *sūtra* on the basis of its characteristics is also a sort of interpretation of that very *mantra*. Considering from this point of view the Brāhmaṇas appear to be interpretations of the Vedic *mantras*, for, they, for the first time, in the knowledge of the *mantras*, designate a *mantra* or group of *mantras* sometimes on the name of the deity belonging to that *mantra*, e. g. *Vaiṣṇavīm*,[42] *Sāvitrīm*[43] etc. ; sometimes on the names of metres employed therein, e. g. Gāyatram etc. ; sometimes on the basis of a word occurring therein, e. g. *ātithyavatī*[44] etc.; and sometimes on the basis of ritual in which the *mantra* is employed e. g. *sāmidhenī*,[45] *puronuvākyā*[46] etc. From the emphasis which Brāhmaṇas give to the seer, metre and deity in naming and signifying a *mantra* it is conspicuously obvious that they regarded the knowledge of seer, metre and deity as essential for the understanding of

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39 *sukīrtiṁ śaṁsati devayonir vai sukīrtis tad yajñād devayonyai yajamānaṁ prajanayati* / (*AB.* 30. 3)

40 *etad vai yajñasya samṛddhaṁ yad rūpasamṛddhaṁ yat karma kriyamāṇam ṛg abhivadati* / (*AB* 1. 4); *pathyamāneyam ṛg anuṣṭhīyamānaṁ karmābhivadati sākalyena bravītīti yad asti eṣaiva rūpasamṛddhiḥ* / Sāyaṇa on *AB* 1. 4.

41 *tvām agne puṣkarādadhīti tṛcam āgneyaṁ gāyatram anvāhāgnau mathyamāne svayaivainan tad devatayā svena chandasā samardhayati* / *atharvā niramanthateti rūpasamṛddham etad vai yajñasya samṛddhaṁ yad rūpasamṛddhaṁ yat karma kriyamāṇam ṛg abhivadati* / (*AB* 3. 5)

42 *viṣṇor nu kaṁ vīryāṇi pra vocam iti vaiṣṇavīṁ śaṁsati* / (*AB* 13. 14)

43 *abhi tvā deva savitar iti sāvitrīṁ anvāha* / (*AB* 3. 5)

44 *samidhā'gnim huvasyatā* " *pyāyasva sametu ta ity ājyabhāgayoḥ puronuvākye bhavata ātithyatyau* / (*AB* 3. 6.)

45 *saptadaśa sāmidhenīr anubrūyāt* / (*AB.* 1. 1.)

46 *tvam agne saprathā asi; soma yās te mayobhuva ity ājyabhāgayoḥ puronuvākye brūyāt* / (*AB* 1. 4)

the inherent meaning of the *mantras*. The *Ārṣeya Brāhmaṇa* says : '**He,** who employs a *mantra* in a sacrifice or teaches it without knowing the seer, metre and deity of the *mantra*, attains misfortune.'[47]

Though the Brāhmaṇas do not claim to interpret each and every *mantra* in a systematic, well-planned and well-organised manner, sometimes they give word-by-word explanation of a *mantra*. For example we may quote the explanation of *ṚV*. X. 71.10,[48] as given by the *AB* (3. 2) :

sarve nandanti yaśasā "gatenety anvāha | yaśo vai somo rājā sarvo ha vā etena krīyamāṇena nandati yaś ca yajñe lapsyamāno bhavati yaś ca na | 'sabhāsahena sakhyā sakhāya' ity eṣa vai brāhmaṇānāṁ sabhāsāhaḥ sakhā yat somo rājā | kilbiṣaspṛd ity eṣa u eva kilbiṣaspṛt | yo vai bhavati yaḥ śreṣṭhatāṁ aśnute sa kilbiṣaṁ bhavati | tasmād āhur mā'nuvoco mā pracārīḥ kilbiṣaṁ nu mā yātayann iti | pituṣaṇir ity annaṁ vai pitu dakṣiṇā vai pitu tām anena sanoty annasanim evainaṁ tat karoti | araṁ hito bhavati vājināyetīndriyaṁ vai vīryaṁ vājinam | ājarasaṁ hāsmai vājinaṁ nāpacchidyate ya evaṁ veda |

This interpretation of the *AB.* in no way seems to be much different from that of the later traditional commentators of the Vedas.

While interpreting a *mantra*, Brāhmaṇas generally quote the *mantras* in their initial part (*pratīkena*) if they belonged to the same school. Sometimes it also happens that the authors of the Brāhmaṇas use and explain certain portions of the *mantra* more than once. For example, *ṚV*. I. 99. 1 is quoted and explained at *AB* 20. 2, 4; 21. 2; 22. 3; 23. 2. 4; 24. 2. Normally the Brāhmaṇas quote and explain those very *mantras* which are used by their respective officiants and collected in the Saṁhitās of their own. This did not, however, prevent the authors of the Brāhmaṇas from quoting texts belonging to the other Vedas. They were free in borrowing from the *Ṛgveda saṁhitā* even on behalf of officiants other than the Hotar and his assistants. For example, the *Taittirīya Brāhmaṇa* (3. 5. 1 ff.) which belongs to the Black *Yajurveda* includes a section on the office of the Hotar and explains the *mantras* of the *ṚV*.

To conclude the above observations on the nature of Brāhmaṇic interpretation, it can be said that Brāhmaṇas are the commentaries of the

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47 *yo ha vā'viditārṣeyacchandodaivatabrāhmaṇena mantreṇa yājayati vā'dhyāpayati vā sthāṇuṁ vā''rcchati gartaṁ vā''padyate* / (*Ārṣeya Br.* 1. 1).

48 *Sarve nandanti yaśasāgatena*
sabhāsāhena sakhyā sakhāyaḥ /
kilbiṣaspṛtpituṣaṇir hy eṣām
araṁ hito bhavati vājināya // (*RV* X. 71. 10)

Vedas. In those days Yajña had become pivot of all thoughts and activities, whether religious or social. Therefore, it was in the fitness of things that they interpreted Vedic *mantras* keeping the sacrifices in view which were social and religious need of the time. And from this point of view their interpretation can be called a ritualistic interpretation. The devices viz., implication (*viniyoga*), argumentation or reasoning (*hetu*), etymology (*nirvacana*), *bandhu*, *rūpa* and *rūpasamṛddhi*, introduced by the Brāhmaṇas were in complete consonance with their ritualistic interpretation. In this ritualistic interpretation they used many symbols establishing esoteric significance and divine connection or relations with the rituals performed, on the basis of which their interpretation is also called symbolic. But there was no fundamental difference between their ritualistic and symbolical interpretations. As a matter of fact, the latter was an aid to the former.

The Brāhmaṇas have great impact on the later Vedic interpretation. The devices which they had introduced to interpret Vedic *mantras* with ritualistic outlook, however, bacame different systems of Vedic interpretation. In the time of Yāska we find no less than nine such schools of Vedic interpretation, but all had their origin in the Brāhmaṇas.